Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 16 Number 3 March 2019

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17th March 2019: Ananthagiri Hills. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Besides being a pleasant woodland walk, Ananthagiri has always been very productive from the birding viewpoint, and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, Orange-headed Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water. Most important: Please avoid plastic carry bags and containers. Let us all make it a habit to say no to plastic!

As usual, Surekha (9949038532) will coordinate. Please let her know if you need a lift, and if you can accommodate extra passengers. Members are requested to be on time as it is a long, two-hour drive. Non-members are requested to donate Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. We will also be carrying our new T-Shirts and Caps, and suggest you buy your quota before the stock is exhausted. T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Please tender exact change.

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Harpal Singh, Senior Journalist, on "Forests – Destruction and Hope". Tuesday, 19th March 2019, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

The former composite Adilabad district once boasted of a fabulous green cover of about 45 per cent of its expanse. Having been ravaged by different sections of the society during the last four decades, these forests portray what ails environment today. To reverse the trend of wanton destruction of the environment, it is important to understand the gamut in the context of the pressures that the forests face.

Mr. Harpal Singh is a senior newspaper reporter having extensive experience in environmental issues. He will share his insights on the above topic, and it promises to be a very interesting talk.

Trip Report – Air Force Academy, Dundigal, January 20, 2019

Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao

The group during the walk (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

This January we decided to set off to visit the Air Force Academy, Dundigal which is located around 40km north of the city and just short of the all-too-familiar Narsapur Forest.

Air Force officials at the Academy reacted positively to our formal request and set the ball rolling by inviting me for a Liaison Visit to chalk out the mandatory Security and Administrative drills. Every aspect of our visit was planned in detail and the Academy waited to receive the Deccan Birders members on the following Sunday morning.

As the news of the Visit to the Academy was formally announced on the Group, the names of participants started pouring in. The Academy officially catered for 25 visitors, but the response was so overwhelming that we had to stop registrations as the numbers crossed 45.

On D-Day everyone set off in a Northerly direction to reach AFA well in time. Wing Commander VG Krishna and his team received us. After the mandatory Security drills we were briefed about the plan for the day. It was a pleasure to set off for birding well ahead of our scheduled time.

Coppersmith Barbet (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Baya Weaver (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We were accompanied by 15 Air Warriors from the Flight Safety Wing, who form part of the Bird Hazard Control Teams that are on ever-vigilant look-out to warn and prevent Bird Strikes on the aircraft. Some family members of the Air Warriors also accompanied us, braving the morning chill to understand the nuances of bird identification and recording. We found most of them very knowledgeable and they showed equal enthusiasm to spot and identify the birds.

Small Minivet (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The initial walk through the 'Copper Pods' jungle, in the chilly morning air was enchanting. The sky was clear and the sun was bright and this put a cheer on all the birders, especially the ones with 'cannons'. This walk led us to an open scrub where we spotted the most birds. A large number of species in a small area put us all in high spirits.

Barn Swallow (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Grey Francolin (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

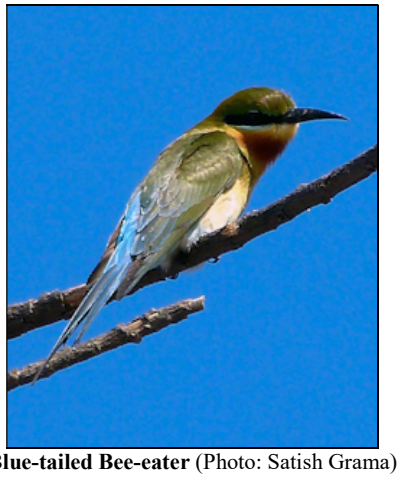
We spent a good three hours to walk the 8km distance and recorded 52 species. At the end of the walk a sumptuous breakfast was waiting. We were transported by a bus to the Faculty of Flying where the Combined Graduation and Passing Out Parade is conducted every 6 months. Breakfast at the Foyer was a dream come true for some and nostalgia for the others.

Blue-faced Malkoha (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

We then had an official group photograph and moved to the hangar to see the static aircraft display.

The group at Air Force Academy
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

This event truly enthralled everyone as the Academy put on display for us one of the most modern trainer aircraft, the Pilatus PC-7 MkII, a Swiss-made plane. We all turned our attention to Flt Lt Archana and her Technical Team as they explained about the aircraft in detail. This was followed by rapid fire Q&A sessions which the team of instructors took on with ease. Some of us were busy getting themselves photographed while others waited patiently for their turn to have glimpse of the cockpit. The session came to a close after everyone had an eyeful of the aircraft. As we moved towards the bus we were treated to an aerial display by a flock of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters. We were seen off at the gate by the Liaison Officer and his team. Each one of the Deccan Birders thanked the personnel for taking out time for this event and making it such a memorable one.



Blue-tailed Bee-eater (Photo: Satish Grama)

Black-headed Cuckooshrike
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

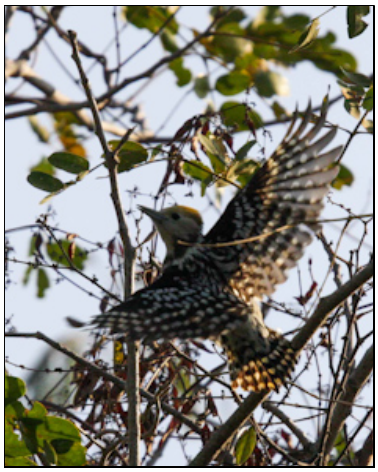
Special acknowledgements are due to Air Vice Marshal G Amar Prasad Babu VM, for readily accepting our request and directing a flawless execution of this event.

Brown Shrike (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The complete list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Sl No	Species Name	Sl No	Species Name
1	Indian Peafowl	19	Small Minivet	37	Zitting Cisticola
2	Grey Francolin	20	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	38	Yellow-eyed Babbler
3	Spotted Dove	21	Brown Shrike	39	Large Grey Babbler
4	Laughing Dove	22	Bay-backed Shrike	40	Yellow-billed Babbler
5	Greater Coucal	23	Black Drongo	41	Indian Robin
6	Blue-faced Malkoha	24	Rufous Treepie	42	Oriental Magpie Robin
7	Asian Koel	25	Dusky Crag Martin	43	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
8	Oriental Honey-buzzard	26	Barn Swallow	44	Black Redstart
9	Shikra	27	Red-rumped Swallow	45	Rosy Starling
10	Eurasian Hoopoe	28	Red-vented Bulbul	46	Common Myna
11	Green Bee-eater	29	White-browed Bulbul	47	Pale-billed Flowerpecker
12	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	30	Greenish Warbler	48	Purple-rumped Sunbird
13	Indian Roller	31	Booted Warbler	49	Purple Sunbird
14	Coppersmith Barbet	32	Sykes's Warbler	50	Baya Weaver
15	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	33	Common Tailorbird	51	Red Avadavat
16	Black-rumped Flameback	34	Grey-breasted Prinia	52	Indian Silverbill
17	Streak-throated Woodpecker	35	Ashy Prinia		
18	Common Iora	36	Plain Prinia		

Some other photos taken during the trip:



Yellow-crowned Woodpecker
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Large Grey Babbler
(Photo: Satish Grama)

Indian Robin
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Black Drongo
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Indian Silverbill
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

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ICRISAT STORIES

Trip Report – ICRISAT, January 5, 2019

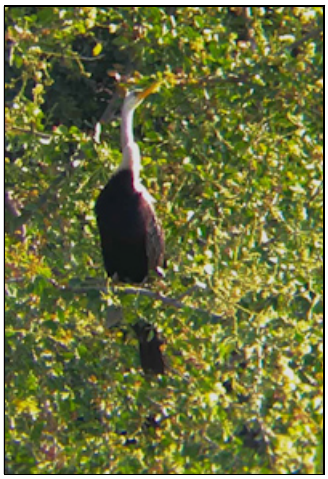
Rama Sarvani

A lake scene at ICRISAT (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

First, all thanks to my uncle Mohan Sharma, who was with ICRISAT for more than 20 years, for helping us in getting permission and enabling the trip to go smoothly and comfortably. Amazing food at the canteen also, which energized us for the walk around the huge campus.

ICRISAT campus (Photos: Rama Sarvani)

Having just got back from the US, my memory of many Indian species of birds was somewhat clogged, and I couldn't differentiate between many of the birds that we saw on this trip. So I had spent nearly all my energy on recollecting the different types of Sandpipers and Cormorants, when I saw a Northern Pintail and this beauty really got me excited. Even spotting a Darter brought back memories of my early birding days, when spotting the 'Snakebird' used to be my goal.



Darter (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

This time, it was a quest for the Bar-headed Geese. It was like the ultimate bird which I really wanted to see at ICRISAT, but in vain. However, there were around 6 Greater Flamingos, 15 Northern Shovelers, a multitude of Spot-billed Ducks and Eurasian Coots, and numerous Ruddy Shelducks and Lesser Whistling-ducks, all of which I could identify with help from my co-birders Ram, Sravan and Deepa. Hats off to their patience while helping me shake my memory a bit.

A mixed flock (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

I had been to the campus earlier on BSAP trips and also with my uncle, and kind of knew the campus, so I assumed we could walk around after the sumptuous breakfast at the ICRISAT cafeteria. As we started the walk, however, we were informed by one of the guards to take the car as it would get hotter during the day. I thank him now for the suggestion, because it was a pretty long walk towards the water bodies.

Almost immediately, we spotted Indian Hornbills and Indian Golden Orioles in the Eucalyptus branches. The Asian Koel was singing its tunes, and we watched the Whiskered and River Terns swinging here and there and catching fish, and then, we suddenly spotted the Grey-bellied Cuckoo, a lifer for me.

Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Photo: Raghu SR)

River Tern (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Once we started walking towards the waterbody, we encountered numerous Green Bee-eaters, Grey Herons, Painted Storks, Asian Openbills, Red-naped Ibis and a lot of Greater Cormorants.

The Cormorants were so many that now I know how to differentiate the Little from the Great Cormorant. We saw how, with some team work, they could change their direction in a group. There were a lot of Indian Rollers on the electric wires, and many more Oriental Darters just hanging in there.

Indian Roller with broken bill (Photo: Raghu SR)

Lesser Kestrel (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

As we moved along, it was getting hotter and hotter throughout the day, when we spotted some raptors. Sravan, a Raptor freak, spotted a lot of raptors. Amongst them, notable ones were the Lesser Kestrels, 2 of them, which were rolling along with the Rollers.

Oriental Honey-buzzard (Juvenile) (Photo: Raghu SR)

Steppe Eagle (Photo: Raghu SR)

Then we moved on towards the third water body in the campus to see if the Spot-billed Pelicans were nesting there or not. We did not see the nests, but did see some Pelicans. There were a lot of Eurasian Coots and Spot-billed Ducks, which were being chased by a Marsh Harrier. Sravan was able to capture some amazing pictures of the entire action.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier attacking Common Coot (Photos: Raghu SR)

All in all, a wonderful trip!

Scaly-breasted Munia flock (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Common Hoopoe (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

The complete list of birds seen is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Sl No	Species Name	Sl No	Species Name
1	Lesser Whistling-Duck	33	Grey Heron	65	Indian Golden Oriole
2	Ruddy Shelduck	34	Purple Heron	66	Black Drongo
3	Northern Shoveler	35	Great Egret	67	Rufous Treepie
4	Indian Spot-billed Duck	36	Little Egret	68	House Crow
5	Northern Pintail	37	Cattle Egret	69	Dusky Crag Martin
6	Common Pochard	38	Indian Pond Heron	70	Barn Swallow
7	Indian Peafowl	39	Black-crowned Night Heron	71	Red-rumped Swallow
8	Grey Francolin	40	Glossy Ibis	72	Red-vented Bulbul
9	Greater Flamingo	41	Red-naped Ibis	73	Blyth's Reed Warbler
10	Little Grebe	42	Black-winged Kite	74	Ashy Prinia
11	Rock Pigeon	43	Short-toed Snake Eagle	75	Plain Prinia
12	Eurasian Collared Dove	44	Booted Eagle	76	Zitting Cisticola
13	Spotted Dove	45	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	77	Lesser Whitethroat
14	Asian Koel	46	Shikra	78	Yellow-billed Babbler
15	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	47	Black Kite	79	Asian Brown Flycatcher
16	Asian Palm-Swift	48	Eurasian Hoopoe	80	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
17	Eurasian Moorhen	49	Indian Grey Hornbill	81	Common Stonechat
18	Eurasian Coot	50	Common Kingfisher	82	Pied Bushchat
19	Grey-headed Swamphen	51	White-throated Kingfisher	83	Asian Pied Starling
20	Black-winged Stilt	52	Pied Kingfisher	84	Common Myna
21	Red-wattled Lapwing	53	Green Bee-eater	85	Pale-billed Flowerpecker
22	Bronze-winged Jacana	54	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	86	Purple-rumped Sunbird
23	Common Sandpiper	55	Indian Roller	87	Purple Sunbird
24	Wood Sandpiper	56	Coppersmith Barbet	88	Paddyfield Pipit
25	Whiskered Tern	57	Black-rumped Flameback	89	Baya Weaver
26	River Tern	58	Lesser Kestrel	90	Red Avadavat
27	Asian Openbill	59	Rose-ringed Parakeet	91	Indian Silverbill
28	Painted Stork	60	Plum-headed Parakeet	92	Scaly-breasted Munia
29	Oriental Darter	61	Small Minivet	93	Oriental Honey-buzzard
30	Little Cormorant	62	Large Cuckooshrike	94	Steppe Eagle
31	Great Cormorant	63	Long-tailed Shrike	95	Common Kestrel
32	Spot-billed Pelican	64	Southern Grey Shrike		

Some other photos taken during the trip:

Shikra (Photo: Raghu SR)

Black-headed Cuckooshrike
(Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Cormorants in flight
(Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Grey Heron (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Painted Stork (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Northern Shoveler (Photo: Raghu SR)

Pied Kingfisher (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

Grey-headed Swamphen (Photo: Raghu SR)

Common Kestrel (female) (Photo: Raghu SR)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*)

Red Avadavat Male (Left), Female (Centre) and Juvenile (Right) (Manjeera WLS, January 10, 2019)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Estrildidae
Genus: *Amandava*
Species: *A. amandava*
Size: 10 cm

Description & distribution: The Red Avadavat (aka Red Munia or Strawberry Finch) is a member of the Estrildidae family. It is around the same size as a Sparrow; the male has a striking deep red body with distinct white spots on the upperparts and wing feathers. It also has a black eye-stripe, darker belly, dark pinkish legs, rounded black tail, and a seasonally red bill. The non-breeding male is duller but still has a red rump. The female is duller overall, with lesser number of white spots on wings, but the reddish bill and black eye-stripe are still noticeable. Interestingly, the scientific name *amandava* and the common name *Avadavat* are both derived from the name of the city of Ahmedabad, from where it used to be exported for the pet trade in older times.

The bill undergoes a seasonal change in colour, turning red in May, darkening towards November/December, and turning black rapidly in April before starting the cycle again in May.

The nominate sub-species *A. amandava* is seen in Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. *A. a. flavidiventris* is seen in Myanmar, and parts of China, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, while *A. a. punicea* is the Javan species, and *A. a. decouxi* is seen in Cambodia.

Habitat & behaviour: The Red Avadavat breeds across the Indian subcontinent in the flat plains, grasslands and open fields with standing crops or tall grasses, usually near water. It is usually seen in small flocks, and tends to fly with rapid wingbeats before descending into grass clumps or reeds. Birds often ruffle their head feathers as an invitation, and in a flock, preen each other.

Pairs stay together for the breeding season. The call is a single-note *pseep*, usually given out in flight; while the song is a series of low notes. The diet consists mainly of grass seeds, although it does occasionally take insects like termites.

Nesting: The Red Avadavat breeds mainly between November and April. The nest is globular and made of grass blades. The usual clutch consists of 5-6 white eggs.

Local name: The Red Avadavat is known as *'Laal munia'* in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Punjabi, '*Torra jinuwayi*' or '*Yerra jinuwayi*' in Telugu and *'Chevenna munia'* in Malayalam.

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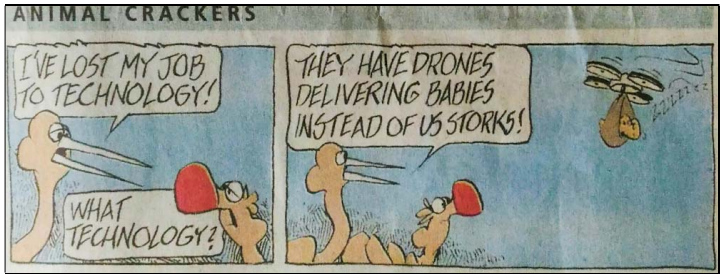
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(From The Times of India, October 1, 2012)

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For Private Circulation Only
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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*